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Modalities for the exchange of national experiences at the regional level

Report of the Secretary-General

Executive summary

In paragraph 133 (c) of the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, the General Assembly noted that the Commission for Sustainable Development "should provide a forum for the exchange of experience on regional and subregional initiatives and regional collaboration for sustainable development. This could include the promotion of voluntary regional exchange of national experience in the implementation of Agenda 21 and, *inter alia*, the possible development of modalities for reviews within regions by and among those countries that voluntarily agree to do so."

In order to explore the issues regarding such regional exchanges and the ways in which the Commission might promote them, a review of existing modalities for the exchange of information was undertaken. The modalities included conferences, workshops and seminars; voluntary national reporting; mandatory national reporting; surveillance consultations; and country policy reviews. The findings and options that emerged from the review were discussed at a consultative meeting of regional organizations held in New York from 4 to 6 February 1998.

The present report presents the results of the review and the recommendations of the consultative meeting for the consideration of the Commission. In general, it was concluded that a first step would be to devise a means to make better use of the voluntary national reporting to the Commission, to provide a regional focus for the exchange of that information, in addition to its submission to the Commission, and to use it to analyse trends within a region. In particular, the Commission may wish to support a proposal from the

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Economic Commission for Europe to test the conclusions of the review in a pilot project for the exchange of national experiences, subject to the availability of funding, in cooperation with other regional institutions of Europe, including non-governmental organizations, and the other regional commissions.

Attention is drawn to the need to continue support to countries to develop capacity in the areas of data collection, coordination and analysis and in building electronic networks for exchanging information at the national, regional and international levels.

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I. Background

1. In the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, Member States agreed that the Commission on Sustainable Development should, *inter alia*, "continue to provide a forum for the exchange of national experience and best practices in the area of sustainable development, including through voluntary national communications or reports".[1] The Programme also notes that countries in given regions had much to gain from exchanging information on best practices and on national implementation of Agenda 21 and that there were transboundary issues which lent themselves specifically to regional cooperation. In that regard it was agreed that:

> "The Commission should take into account regional developments related to the implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. It should provide a forum for the exchange of experience on regional and subregional initiatives and regional collaboration for sustainable development. This could include the promotion of the voluntary regional exchange of national experience in the implementation of Agenda 21 and, *inter alia*, the possible development of modalities for reviews within regions by and among those countries that voluntarily agree to do so. In this context, the Commission should encourage the availability of funding for the implementation of initiatives related to such reviews".[2]

2. This recommendation by the Commission led to an exploration of the issues that would arise in promoting regional exchanges of information – for example, the timing and scope of such exchanges and their link to the Commission's work plan. What would countries gain? What, in effect, would be the added value of such exchanges and how would they be undertaken? In an attempt to answer these questions and present options, a review of the current reporting process of the Commission on Sustainable Development and of other existing models for exchanges of information or reviews, both regionally and internationally, was undertaken. The findings were presented to a consultative meeting[3] of regional institutions, organized by the Division for Sustainable Development (New York, 4-6 February). Issues of modality, focus and the periodicity of possible reviews were considered and discussed by the participants, in plenary, in working groups and in informal consultations. The results are reflected in the present paper, for the Commission's consideration.

II. The reporting process so far

3. Voluntary national reporting to the Commission, which began in 1993 with general and open-ended queries, had evolved by 1997 into requests for comprehensive national profiles on the status of implementation of Agenda 21. During those years efforts were made to collect information more directly relevant to the agenda of the Commission and to streamline national reporting requirements throughout the United Nations system. Country reports are reviewed and analysed by the Secretariat as a source of information for the thematic reports prepared for each session of the Commission and as an indication of both international and regional trends. In addition, efforts continue to present the information received in a systematic and accessible format on a World Wide Web site[4] set up for the purpose.

4. The Commission has provided a forum for formal presentations of national experience during its regular sessions. Reporting to the Commission and the preparation of country profiles have served a number of important purposes, including:

(a) Bringing together an array of stakeholders at the national level to promote and guide strategies, review progress, interact and work towards a common assessment of the implementation of Agenda 21;

(b) Initiating or furthering national strategies for sustainable development;

(c) Strengthening internal dialogue;

(d) Spurring efforts to organize and coordinate the collection of information.

Reporting is also intended to raise public awareness by providing transparency and allowing the sharing of experiences and information. The interest generated by the country profiles, the country presentations to the Commission and, more recently, the Web site point to considerable success in achieving that objective.

5. In 1997, in response to the decision by the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session that reporting to the Commission should continue, guidelines were prepared and sent to Governments on the provision of information regarding the issues to be dealt with by the Commission at its sixth session. The information received was utilized in the preparation of reports to the Commission and is being used to update the country files on the Web site.

III. Modalities for the exchange of information at the regional and international levels

6. Currently, information is shared at the regional, subregional and international levels through informal exchanges at conferences, workshops, and seminars; national reporting to intergovernmental bodies (both voluntary and mandatory); surveillance consultations; and policy reviews.[5]

Conferences, workshops and seminars

7. In every region, the exchange of information on national policy and management experiences is undertaken within a framework of projects and seminars on sectoral and cross-sectoral themes carried out by regional and subregional organizations. The exchanges occur mostly in the context of priorities established at regional ministerial meetings and often in preparation for international meetings. In those cases the exchange of information and best practices may not be the specific focus of the discussion but emerge as by-products of a more technical or sectoral exchange.

Voluntary national reporting

8. Voluntary reporting, similar to that requested by the Commission, is another mechanism widely used to assess implementation of agreements and for the exchange of information. In most cases countries provide reports to the secretariat of an intergovernmental body for review, analysis and summary. Examples include reporting in follow-up to the Summit on Social Development or to the Summit of the Americas on Sustainable Development.[6] Because requests for such reporting have multiplied over the past few years, following the series of major conferences and regional summits, an effort is currently being made to streamline reporting requirements. Consequently, the contours of periodic national reporting may change.

Mandatory national reporting

9. Mandatory national reports, such as treaty reviews, are similar to voluntary national reports, with one major exception: reporting is an inherent part of compliance with the international legal instrument. Treaty reviews normally include reports due from countries according to a specific timetable with precise instructions for preparation and response. In some cases the responses go directly to intergovernmental bodies where they are reviewed; in others, they are first reviewed by the Secretariat which then forwards them to the intergovernmental body.

Surveillance consultations

10. The International Monetary Fund has a mandate to exercise surveillance over the exchange rate policies of members in order to oversee the international monetary system and ensure its effective operation. The two principal means of surveillance are annual consultations with each member country, known as Article IV consultations, and the biannual World Economic Outlook discussions, which consider issues and policies from a global perspective.

Country policy reviews

11. Country policy reviews are undertaken by an intergovernmental body at a session of that body, but only after considerable information-gathering and analysis has been carried out by either a secretariat or an expert group. In most cases the analytical work is based on, or relies heavily on, information supplied by the country being reviewed. It may involve a visit to the country for meetings with governmental officials and other authorities. The process normally results in a written product which is revised and published, pursuant to consideration by the intergovernmental body. In some cases, there is provision for the designation of "examining countries" or "discussants" who have a more active role than other participants – for example, in the OECD/ECE environmental performance reviews; the OECD economic and development reviews; the OECD reviews of development cooperation policies and programmes; the OECD agricultural policy reviews; the GATT/WTO trade policy reviews; and the science, technology and innovation policy reviews undertaken by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on behalf of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development.[7]

IV. Options for national exchanges of information on sustainable development at the regional level

12. After identifying the modalities listed above, the meeting examined issues such as the availability of data, the level of exchange, and the focus and the periodicity of the reviews. Three options for regional exchanges were found to be feasible:

(a) Information could be exchanged on issues related to the agenda of the Commission. Such an arrangement would allow for comparability of data, enrich the work of the Commission and streamline the preparation of reports. Regional meetings could be organized at which interested

countries could be invited to exchange best practices in the areas to be dealt with by the Commission. Countries with particularly successful strategies in a given area might wish to detail their success, costs, and policies for possible replication. The outcomes of these regional exchanges could be reported to the Commission;

(b) Information could be exchanged on issues related to priorities identified in the region itself, taking advantage of existing information exchange at, for example, ministerial meetings. This process could be enhanced by an additional component, specifically, the exchange of best practices in given areas;

(c) Countries willing to go beyond exchanges of information and of good practices and undertake reviews of national sustainable development policies could consider following a procedure similar to that used in the GATT/WTO trade policy reviews or the UNCTAD science, technology and innovation policy reviews. They could produce comprehensive reviews of the complete policy area and the extent to which sustainable development has been incorporated into regional decision-making, with a view to recommending specific follow-up actions.

V. Conclusions

13. The consultative meeting came to the following conclusions:

(a) Value could be added to national information through regional and subregional analysis and exchange, and that could contribute to the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development in monitoring implementation of Agenda 21 and in evaluating the effectiveness of national and regional policies in achieving sustainable development objectives;

(b) The information to be exchanged should be relevant both to the agenda of the Commission and to regional priorities. It could be both sectoral and cross-sectoral, and would likely vary to some extent by region. Consensus on regional priorities should involve, in some regions, further consultations in order actively to engage finance ministries and development banks. No new or additional reporting should be required, and other sources of information on sustainable development should be included;

(c) For several regional institutions, issues of data availability and the development of information management systems at the country level are a major concern. In many cases, basic data for reporting and thus for exchanges of information are not available, and one objective might be to provide assistance to those countries to compile the required information. An important part of the process of regional information exchange, therefore, would also be an assessment by national Governments and regional and subregional institutions of the availability of information and databases on different disciplines related to sustainable development. There is need for additional support for the building of national capacity-building in this area;

(d) Exchange of information through workshops, technical meetings and seminars, involving all stakeholders, should continue, at both the regional and subregional levels. Electronic networks need to be established or strengthened on issues related to Agenda 21, in order to facilitate the exchange of best practices and other experience, to establish rosters of experts and focal points, and to push for the further organization of databases at the national level;

(e) Voluntary national reporting to the Commission continues to be a high-priority means of exchanging national information, and it is an important source of information for other national Governments, regional institutions and civil society as a whole. Peer reviews are extremely valuable as a means of information exchange, monitoring and feedback, but they are capital- and labour-intensive and rely on access to good information infrastructure. Their application in regions outside of Europe and in non-European member States of OECD remains a long-range, not an immediate, goal.

14. Overall, it was concluded that, at this point in time, a first step would be to devise a means to make better use of the voluntary national reporting process to the Commission, to provide a regional focus for the exchange of the information, in addition to its submission to the Commission, and to use it to analyse trends within a region.

VI. Action by the Commission

15. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) has proposed a test of the above conclusions in a pilot project for the exchange of national experiences at the regional level. The Commission may wish to endorse that proposal. The project, subject to the availability of funding, would be undertaken in cooperation with other regional organizations in Europe, including non-governmental organizations. The other regional commissions would also be invited to participate.

16. Pursuant to a request from the Commission on Social Development, ECE would take responsibility for an ongoing process of analysis which would:

(a) Review all country and EU reports submitted to the Commission in a given year as well as other relevant documents;

(b) Define an appropriate modality for a comparative analysis of the progress made by the countries in those areas being considered by the Commission;

(c) Provide an inventory of best practices and, if appropriate, an assessment;

(d) Review national priorities and analyse the extent to which national priorities coincide with regional priorities and concur with priorities of the Commission.

17. After preparations, a workshop would be organized to discuss the background analysis and recommend action to be taken, with emphasis on policy formulation and capacity-building. The workshop would also assess the value of the pilot project and suggest the next steps, including, for example, the establishment of a mechanism to assure ongoing implementation and periodicity of such reviews. The results of the workshop would be submitted to the Commission and would be shared with other regional institutions.

18. Governments and other donors are invited to support the implementation of the pilot project, consistent with paragraph 133 (c) of the "Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21".[2]

19. The Commission may also wish to encourage additional support for capacity-building in the area of data collection and information technology, on the basis of the results of the review and of the regional consultations. It may also wish to provide a window for presentations on some of the interesting regional initiatives that are taking place in implementing Agenda 21.

Notes

[1] General Assembly resolution S/19-2, annex, para. 133 (b).

[2] Ibid., para. 133 (c).

[3] Participants included representatives from the following organizations: for Africa, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Regional Office for Africa, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Regional Office for Africa, the African Development Bank, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC); for Asia, the Pacific and Western Asia, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), UNEP Regional Office for West Asia, UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States, UNDP Asia/Pacific Bureau, Asian Development Bank, Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), and the South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP); for Europe, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), UNDP Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the European Commission; for North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, Santiago), ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean, UNEP Regional Office for North America, UNEP Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, UNDP Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), and the Organization of American States (OAS). At the international level, the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank also participated.

[4] The Internet address is: http://www.un.org/esa/agenda21/natlinfo/.

[5] See the annex below for examples of the various modalities.

[6] Held in Santa Cruz de la Siena, Bolivia, in December 1996.

[7] See A/AC.237/63.

Annex

Examples of modalities for the exchange of information

1. The Secretariat solicited information from a number of regional and subregional organizations, including the regional commissions, on the various modalities of information exchange outlined above. Examples are provided below, for purposes of illustration only.

A. Conferences, workshops and seminars

2. In the ECA region, within the context of the programme of the Joint Secretariat of the African Ministers Conference on the Environment (AMCEN), priority was given to support for capacity-building in the area of information and data collection. Ministers at the African High-level Ministerial Meeting on Environmental Impact Assessment (June 1995) decided that the establishment of a mechanism to promote information exchange on a regular basis required immediate action.

3. In the ECLAC region an extensive series of regional seminars and courses in priority sectors has taken place at which policy and management experiences were exchanged. The priority sectors were identified at various regional ministerial conferences. A symposium specifically dealing with environmental information and indicators was held in 1995.

4. ESCAP has implemented a project on environmental assessment under which the *1995 State of the Environment Report in the Asian and Pacific Region* was published.[a] The project involved the establishment of national focal points for state-of-the-environment reporting; guidelines were also published.

5. In addition, ESCAP organized a series of workshops and seminars on sectoral and cross-sectoral issues at which national experiences were exchanged. Overall, countries in the region have been making many efforts, with varying degrees of success, to integrate environmental considerations into their economic decision-making processes. There has been, however, little research on the effectiveness of the various modalities and instruments being used or on intercountry exchange of experiences to share best practices.[b] For that reason, ESCAP designed a special project, entitled "Integrating environmental considerations into economic decision-making processes", for the 1997-1998 biennium, specifically to review and exchange experiences, through a series of subregional and regional expert group meetings, on institutional prerequisites at the national, provincial, local and sectoral levels for integrated policy-making and on modalities of environmental assessment as tools for integrated decision-making processes, and to draw best practices from them.[c]

6. In 1995 the European Environmental Agency (EEA) of the European Community prepared a report on the state of the environment in the entire European region, covering nearly 50 countries. The assessment was initiated in 1991 at the first Conference of Pan-European Environment Ministers and was produced for the third "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference, held in Sofia in 1995. It sets a baseline for future monitoring and gives an overall view of the state of the environment and the pressures faced across the continent. It is accompanied by a statistical compendium prepared by the Statistical Office of the EU (Eurostat), EEA, ECE, the World Health Organization (WHO) and OECD. A progress report on the main environmental issues identified in the original assessment is being prepared for the next ministerial conference, to be held in Denmark in June 1998.

B. Voluntary national reporting

7. The General Assembly requested Governments to assess national progress made in implementing the outcome of the Summit on Social Development on a regular basis, possibly in the form of periodic national reports outlining successes, problems and obstacles, and to submit such information on a voluntary basis to the Commission for Social Development.[d] Numerous countries have provided such information to the Commission, and through periodic communications, to the Secretary-General. The Summit also invited the regional commissions to organize biennial high-level evaluation meetings on progress made towards implementing the outcome of the Summit.

8. ECLAC organized the first such meeting in April of 1997. Participating countries presented reports on implementation of the commitments undertaken at the Summit; a ministerial round table was held on macroeconomic management and its impact on poverty; panel discussions were held on the three core issues of the Summit and the ECLAC secretariat presented a document entitled "The equity gap, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Social Summit". The Economic and Social Council, at its July 1997 session, invited other regions to convene

similar evaluation meetings. ESCAP complied by organizing one in its region in November 1997.

9. The OAS has been entrusted with the follow-up to the 1994 Summit of the Americas, held in Miami, and the Declaration of Santa Cruz, adopted at the 1996 Summit of the Americas, held in Santa Cruz de la Siena, Bolivia. Its Unit of Sustainable Development and Environment undertakes to facilitate the exchange of information related to sustainable development in the region. A reporting process was initiated in 1996. A request for information on the status of implementation was sent to 44 participating countries.

10. In the Arab region, the Centre for Environment and Development in the Arab Region and Europe, along with the Arab League, established the Arab Regional Environmental Information Network which contains data and information that member States of the Arab League have been requested to provide regarding their experiences in the implementation of the regional programmes for sustainable development. The secretariat of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment has convened meetings of regional experts to discuss the question of environmental indicators.

C. Mandatory national reporting

11. The ILO reviews 171 conventions on the basis of country reports. There are no country visits; the secretariat prepares a report on its conclusions, which are reviewed by the Committee of Experts on Application of Conventions and Recommendations, in which workers and employers are welcome to take part, thus making the review a tripartite process.

12. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change has a staggered reporting system whereby developed country parties were required to present reports in September 1994 and every three years thereafter, while developing country parties have three years after accession to report. The reports are reviewed by experts and summarized by the secretariat, which forwards them, as appropriate, to the Conference of Parties.

13. The European Union has an agreed regional programme of policy and action in relation to environment and sustainable development, elaborated on the basis of the European environmental treaties. The Union participates in the Commission process and speaks on behalf of its 15 member States on issues that are within the Union's legal competence. The agreed regional programme (fifth environmental action programme, Towards Sustainability) was adopted in 1992, and regular reporting has taken place on its implementation by the European Commission, most recently in a review published in 1996. In addition, the European Environment Agency prepared a report "Environment in the European Union" which updates the Community's *State of the Environment Report, 1992* and is partly based on the report referred to above in paragraph 6.

14. The human rights treaty system, established under the six operative international human rights treaties, consists of a voluntary system of self-monitoring by way of reporting, supervised by six independent and expert international committees. Each treaty provides that States parties will report periodically, generally every two to five years, on the measures they have adopted, to give effect to the rights enumerated in the respective treaty, the progress made in the enjoyment of those rights and any factors and difficulties affecting the fulfilment of the treaty's objectives. This is similar to most kinds of national reporting modalities.

15. The process becomes distinct through the review procedure. Each report is considered, in turn, by an international committee of independent experts in the presence of representatives of the State party in a public process of question and answer, or what is described as "constructive dialogue". The dialogue is non-contentious and non-adversarial and, although the treaty body may sometimes be openly critical of a State, there is no open accusation of human rights violation.

16. This system has been under intense scrutiny in recent years, with calls for its reform from many quarters. Although many are willing to admit the importance of reporting, most point to the fact that the reporting burden is overwhelming States and that consequently there is a very high rate of non-compliance in the submission of reports. In addition, a tremendous backlog exists in the review of reports once submitted, and human and financial resources available within the United Nations Secretariat for servicing the committees are inadequate and likely to diminish. This has led to calls for overhauling the system, *inter alia*, through the streamlining of reporting.

D. Surveillance consultations

17. Surveillance through Article IV consultations is the primary channel for collaboration between IMF and its members. A staff team from IMF visits a given country to discuss with officials economic developments and the monetary, fiscal and structural policies that the authorities are following. The team also gathers relevant economic and financial information. Upon its return to its headquarters, the

team prepares a report analysing the economic situation and evaluating the stance of policies. The IMF Board discusses the report and, at the end of the discussion, the Chair of the Board summarizes the views expressed. The summary is transmitted to the country's authorities. Beginning in April 1997, the Board agreed to issue press information notices, on a voluntary basis, at the conclusion of the consultations.

E. Country policy reviews

18. The OECD/ECE environmental performance reviews evaluate national plans and policies, legislation, organizational capacity, enforcement, compliance and monitoring. They also assess the extent to which environmental policies have been integrated into sectoral policies and how they relate to major groups, such as industry, non-governmental organizations and public interest groups. The reviews are relatively costly but effective tools for assessing the environmental situation in a country and assisting Governments in identifying the next steps to take to improve the environment. It is important to note that they also have the advantage of promoting capacity-building, not only by a thorough analysis of the situation but also, potentially, by bringing that information to the attention of the international community.

19. OECD carries out environmental performance reviews for all OECD countries; ECE supplements the process by carrying out reviews for those countries that are members of ECE but not OECD – i.e., the countries in transition in Eastern Europe. OECD undertakes from five to six reviews per year. To date, ECE has carried out reviews in cooperation with OECD for Poland, Bulgaria, Belarus, Estonia and Slovenia. Albania and Moldova are scheduled next.[e]

20. OECD and the ECE apply almost identical review mechanisms for their environmental performance reviews. The assessment on which a review is based is made by a delegation of experts sent to each country under review for a period of approximately 10 days. In the case of OECD, this is a large delegation, representing from eight to ten countries; for ECE, each delegation represents three countries.

21. In terms of methodology and scrutiny, the country reports on non-OECD countries do not differ markedly from country reports on OECD countries. All reports follow the same outline, examining the management of pollution control and natural resources, including air management (chap. 9 of Agenda 21), water management (chaps. 17 and 18), nature conservation and waste management (chaps. 10-15, 17 and 19-21); policy integration in country-specific sectors (chap. 8); and cooperation with the international community (chaps. 2, 34 and 37). The ensuing report (150-200 pages) is then reviewed by the Group on Environmental Performance of OECD.

22. Like the environmental reviews, the OECD economic and development reviews, reviews of development cooperation policies and programmes, and agricultural policy reviews are based on secretariat analysis and involve country visits, albeit shorter than for the environmental reviews (approximately one and one half days each). Only the reviews on development cooperation policies and programmes involve the examining countries. The results of these processes are studied by expert committees and two examining countries, which have a more active role than other participants in the process.

23. The GATT/WTO trade policy reviews are based on a country report prepared by the secretariat and include a country visit for a duration of from one to one and one half weeks. The reviewed country presents a parallel report. Both reports are reviewed by the GATT Council/WTO trade policy review body, which includes two examining country representatives, acting in their personal capacity. The conclusions of the review are then published.

24. Science, technology and innovation policy reviews were initiated in 1996 by UNCTAD, following a request by the Economic and Social Council in 1995.[f] Although based on the OECD science, technology and innovation reviews – at least from a procedural perspective – the UNCTAD reviews have been adapted to the needs and characteristics of the developing countries and countries in transition. They are not mandated and do not follow a given timetable, but rather are undertaken only at the request of a member State, providing that funds are made available.

25. The purpose of the reviews is to enable participating countries to evaluate the efficiency with which their scientific and technological as well as industrial, economic, educational and social institutions and mechanisms contribute to the development – particularly technological development – of their enterprises. The focus of the reviews is on the interrelationships among the various institutions and stakeholders in the participating country, particularly on the distribution of knowledge among all national agents.

26. Once a country has requested a science, technology and innovation policy review, a programming mission is undertaken by the secretariat to help decide the areas that will be covered. The national counterparts are then required to prepare an extensive background report, for which they bear the cost, describing and analysing the operation of their

country's relevant policies and institutions. Subsequently, a small group of international experts, including a member of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, chosen jointly with the participating country and working with the secretariat, carries out an independent evaluation of the country's relevant conditions and policies.

27. When the expert assessment is finalized, and in order to bring the policy review to the attention of the local community, a round-table meeting is held between the experts and the key stakeholders in the science, technology and innovation system to discuss the conclusions and recommendations.

28. So far, one such review has been completed for Colombia; the 300-page report should be published in the near future. Another review is in process in Jamaica, and another is to be initiated shortly in Ethiopia. Depending on the size of the country and the economy (and therefore on the scope of the review), funds required for these reviews start at around $100,000. The reviews are co-funded by the reviewed country and donors. In the case of Colombia, UNDP provided funding; for Jamaica, it was the Government of the Netherlands. There are at present 11 additional countries which have requested such reviews and whose requests are under consideration, pending the availability of resources.

29. Whether legally binding as a condition of membership, or voluntary, national reviews are generally considered to be of considerable use to the client country. They are not meant to be punitive; rather, their purpose is to assemble, tap and share expertise from other countries – often countries with similar economic and social characteristics – and expertise available within international secretariats. Even where one of the intents is to monitor compliance with an international agreement, the review is directed towards assisting the given country to meet both its obligations and its own objectives, through more functional policies, better institutional coordination and integration, and capacity-building.

Notes

[a] See "Inventory of regional initiatives for sustainable development" (ACC/IACSD/VII/1996/CRP.11).

[b] See E/ESCAP/ESD(4)/8, p. 7.

[c] See E/ESCAP/ESD(4)/1, sect. I(B), and the ESCAP regional report to the Commission at its fifth session (E/CN.17/1997/Misc.68).

[d] See A/52/305.

[e] See ECE's regional report to the Commission at its fifth session (E/CN.17/1997/48).

[f] See E/CN.16/1997/5.